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CHORAL READING IN THE CLASSROOM

(Elementary)

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CURRICULUM LABORATORY
California State Department of Education

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CHORAL READING IN THE CLASSROOM

To introduce choral reading into the classroom, a teacher need not have special training. Sincere enjoyment of poetry, and an awareness of the instructional purposes are the requisites for a profitable experience. Here are a few notes on the purposes, methods, and materials of choral reading. If you haven't tried it before, do it now!

I. Purposes
- a) To develop enjoyment in reading poetry
- b) To extend ability to understand and interpret its meaning
- c) To reflect feeling and interpretation through voice inflection
- d) To speak with clear enunciation and correct pronunciation
- e) To develop a feeling of group unity in a common enterprise.

II. Methods

a) Arrangements for informal class work
1. Unison -- all reading a part of a selection together
2. Antiphonal -- one group responds to another
   a) Boys respond to girls
   b) Children in one row respond to those in another
   c) Groups arranged by voice pitch, respond to each other, e.g., light, dark; high, medium, low.
3. Solo -- an individual reads part of the selection
4. Refrain -- chorus repeating at intervals

b) Preparation before reading
1. Careful reading of the selection
   a) Enjoy the thought of the poem
   b) Feel the rhythm without falling into sing-song
   c) Watch pronunciation of difficult words
   d) Note where enunciation must be especially clear

2. Noting tempo and tones called for
   a) Reflect the mood of the poem
   b) Plan variety of tempo, tone, and arrangements, emphasis
   c) Note words to be emphasized

3. Marking the lines of the poem to indicate readers
   a) A for all in unison
   b) BC, GC, for Boys' or Girls' Chorus
   c) BS1, BS2, etc., for Solo parts for boys

c) Reading the poem
1. Start together on the first syllable at a sign from the teacher
2. Speak in natural voice
3. Subdue physical motions and emphasize the vocal inflection.

III. Materials

A. Selection according to purpose

1. For young children, an activity rhyme and antiphonal reading

e.g. B. Jennie come tie my
Jennie come tie my (tying motion)
Jennie come tie my bonnie cravat

G. I've tied it behind
I've tied it before (tying motions)
I've tied it so often I'll tie it no more (finger shaking)

e.g. B. "Where are you going, my pretty maid?" (bowing)
G. "I'm going a-milking, sir," she said. (curtsying)

B. "May I go with you, my pretty maid?"
G. "You're kindly weldome, sir," she said

B. "What is your father, my pretty maid?"
G. "My father's a farmer, sir," she said.

B. "What is your fortune, my pretty maid?"
G. "My face is my fortune, sir," she said.

B. "Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid."
G. "Nobody asked you, sir!" she said.

2. For shy children needing individual effort, a poem requiring sequential speaking

e.g. S1 Monday's child is fair of face,
S2 Tuesday's child is full of grace,
S3 Wednesday's child is full of woe,
S4 Thursday's child has far to go,
S5 Friday's child is loving and giving,
S6 Saturday's child works hard for a living;
A But the child that is born on the Sabbath Day
Is fair, and wise, and good, and gay.

3. For most children in elementary grades, a poem with narrative interest, vivid imagery, and strong rhythm

e.g. The Pied Piper (selection)

BC: Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles, (build up)
And ate the cheese out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles;
Split open the kegs of salted sprats, (horror)
Made nests inside men's' Sunday hats
-"- And even spoiled the women's chats (climax)
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifth different sharps and flats.

GC: At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
A: "Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;
And as for our Corporation - shocking
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine (anger of mob)
What's best to rid us of our vermin!"

--Browning

4. For maturing children, a poem calling for appreciation of imagery and interpretation of thought

e.g. The Throstle

GC: "Summer is coming, summer is coming
I know it, I know it, I know it.
Light again, leaf again, life again, love again."

BC: Yes, my wild little Poet

Sing the new year in under the blue.
Last year you sang it as gladly.

GC: "New, new, new, new!"

BC: Is it then so new
That you should carol so madly?

GC: "Love again, song again, nest again, young again,"
BC: Never a prophet so crazy!
And hardly a daisy as yet, little friend,
See, there is hardly a daisy.

GC: "Here again, here, here, here, happy year!"
BC: O warble unchidden, unbidden!
Summer is coming, is coming, my dear,
And all the winters are hidden.

--Tennyson

5. For children experienced in group reading, a poem that challenges their skill

e.g. The Musical Treat

Group 1: There once was a man who could execute
Old Zip Coon on a yellow flute,
And several other tunes to boot,
But he couldn't make a penny with his tootle-ti-toot.

One day he met a singular quaint old man
With a great big tuba, who solemnly said,
Group 2: "I've travelled wide and I've travelled far,
But I never made a penny with my oom-pah-pah."

Groups 1 & 2:
When they met two men who were travelling
With a big bass drum and a cymbal thing
Group 3: Who said, "We've played since early Spring,
But we haven't made a penny with our boom-zing-zing."

Group 1: So the man with flute went tootle-ti-toot,
Group 2: And the other went oom-pah!
Group 3: While the men with drum and the cymbal thing
Went Boom-boom-boom, zing-zing!

All: And they travelled wide and they travelled far
Together they made the welkin ring
With their
Group 1: Tootle-ootle,
Group 2: Oom-pah!
Group 3: Boom, zing-zing!

All: And oh, the pennies the people fling,
When they hear the
Group 1: Tootle-ootle, ootle-ootle, ootle-ootle, ootle-ootle, oo
Group 2: Oom-pah, oom-pah, oom-pah, oom
Group 3: Boom, zing-zing, zing-zing!

--Author Unknown

B. Some books available in Curriculum Library

Bates and Kay	Literature for Interpretation, pp. 383-417
Brown and Heltman,	Let's Read Together Poems, 3 to 6 Grade Volumes, 1949-50.
Dorothy,	Choral Recitation in the Grades, 1950
Flynn,	Voices of Verse, Books one to Four, 1944
Hamm,	Choral Speaking Techniques, 1941
Hicks,	The Reading Chorus, 1939
Keppie,	Choral Verse Speaking, 1939